

What is Child Abuse?

Child Abuse is the non-accidental commission of any act upon a child under age 18 which causes, or creates a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury, or any sexual contact between a person and a child including pornography and sexual exploitation.

Forms of Child Abuse:

Emotional Injury is an impairment to or disorder of the intellectual or psychological capacity of a child as evidenced by observable and substantial reduction in the child's ability to function within a normal range of performance and behavior.

Neglect is failure by a caretaker, either deliberately or through negligence or inability to take those actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care; provided, however, that such inability is not due solely to inadequate economic resources or solely to the existence of a handicapping condition.

Abusive Head Trauma is trauma/injury sustained to the head of a young child when method/mode of injury is not indicated.

Physical Injury includes death, or fracture of a bone, subdural hematoma, burns, impairment of any organs, and any other such nontrivial injury, or soft tissue swelling or skin bursting, depending upon such factors as the child's age, circumstances under which the injury occurred and the number and location of bruises; or addiction to a drug or drugs at birth; or failure to thrive.

Sexual Abuse occurs when an adult or an older child asks or pressures a child for sexual contact. The abuser may use physical abuse, bribery, threats, tricks, or take advantage of a child's limited knowledge of sexual matters.

How Can I Help My Child?

Listen. Be sensitive and remain calm. Allow the child to tell you what has happened without placing judgment. Let them know they are not in trouble and that in order to keep them safe, you must let others know who can help understand what has happened and know how to guide you. A child needs to know that you are not angry at them, that you will find assistance and that you would like them to talk with others about what they have told you.

What Should I Do Next?

You can contact the child's pediatrician, your child's school, the Department of Children and Families or your police for assistance. All of these individuals know the appropriate measures to take to help your child and your family. **It is important to do something!** The negative impact of child abuse upon a child's growth and development, learning, ability to trust and develop long lasting positive relationships, as well as good self esteem is well documented. It is very common for a caregiver to initially doubt a child's disclosure, particularly when it involves someone well known to the family. This should not stop you from getting outside assistance. You can always call the Child-At-Risk Hotline at 1-800-792-5200.



(978) 745-6610, x5096



Essex County Child Abuse Project

(978) 745-6610, ext. 5175, 5090

MassGeneral for Children North Shore Medical Center

(978) 354 - 2815

Emergency Services:

(978) 354 - 2750

Lawrence General Hospital

Pediatric SANE/Nurse Practitioner:

(978) 683-4000, ext. 2030

Emergency Services:

(978) 683 - 4000, ext. 2500

Essex Children's Advocacy Center



What to Expect



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978-745-6610, x5096

Essex Children's Advocacy Center

The Essex Children's Advocacy Center is a multidisciplinary partnership of professionals that investigates allegations of child abuse and coordinates services for children and families in a child-friendly and culturally sensitive way. The multidisciplinary partnership includes; medical professionals, prosecutors, victim advocates, law enforcement, child protective services and mental health providers.

Services offered by the center include a multidisciplinary team interview conducted by a Forensic Interviewer, a medical exam by a pediatric sexual assault nurse examiner or doctor, and referrals to mental health services and community resources.



The Forensic Interview

The multidisciplinary team investigation occurs between one child and one forensic child interview specialist in a child-friendly room. During the interview the child will have the opportunity to discuss school, home, being safe, as well as incidents of abuse.

The interview room is equipped with cameras so that a team including an Assistant District Attorney, police detective, Department of Children and Families worker, a victim advocate, and a medical professional may observe. This reduces the number of times a child will be interviewed.

Children seem to be put at ease by knowing what to expect. It is helpful to inform your child that someone wishes to talk with him or her about what was reported and to encourage him or her to speak freely and to tell the truth. It is equally as important *not* to rehearse with your child or tell your child what to say.

At the conclusion of the interview parents and guardians will have an opportunity to meet with the team and discuss how the investigation will proceed.

Medical Evaluation

When there is a concern or report of child abuse, children deserve a medical evaluation performed by a doctor, nurse, or nurse practitioner with expertise in this area. This exam is important for several reasons:

- To ensure the health and well being of your child.
- To reassure the child that everything is okay with their body.
- To diagnose and treat medical conditions that may be related to the abuse.
- To document any possible physical and forensic findings.
- To allow for collection of evidence that may be present on the child's body or clothing.



This medical evaluation is usually not painful or invasive. The evaluation also provides an opportunity for the child and families to be linked to other important services and resources. While a medical evaluation is suggested for most children when there is a concern of sexual abuse, a parent or guardian has the choice of whether they want their child to have this exam.

In Essex County, these evaluations can be done at MassGeneral for Children North Shore Medical Center, Salem and Lawrence General Hospital.

Mental Health Services

Mental Health services are crucial in addressing the immediate and long-term effects of child abuse-related trauma, including:

- Working through and understanding the layers of impact of the abuse. "Damaged goods syndrome", sexually-reactive behaviors, guilt or shame, fear or anxiety, depression or low self-esteem, inability to trust, and/or acting-out behaviors are some of the most common yet complex responses children experience as they move through the healing process.
- If the perpetrator of the abuse is a family member or is known by the family, the child often feels responsible for the chaos brought about by a disclosure of abuse. Re-establishing a sense of safety and control marks the early stages of therapy. It is also crucial to address the stress that the family may experience in many areas of their life following a child's disclosure of abuse.

The course of therapy for both the child and the family benefit from working with mental health providers around the healing process.

Child: Children are referred to local mental health providers that specialize in working with children around trauma. The initial treatment is focused on helping the child re-establish trust and safety, and understand that this was not their fault. Following the initial therapy around the abuse/trauma, children will often need short-term therapy as they pass through developmental stages.

Family: Families are able to work with mental health providers around supporting their child, how to re-establish safety and structure for their child, as well as recognizing the symptoms and behaviors of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Providers can also help families understand that it is very common for children to need additional mental health services as they age.